

FACT SHEET

GREAT LAKES AREAS OF CONCERN

OVERVIEW

EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



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THE PROBLEM

The Great Lakes are cleaner now than at any time in recent history due to a U.S. - Canada commitment of billions of dollars and more stringent pollution controls on sewage treatment. However there are many localized areas, called Areas of Concern, in urban or industrial centers, at river mouths and harbors, that have not improved significantly in water quality. Most of these areas are contaminated with toxic chemicals, which, unlike pollutants like raw sewage, are odorless and invisible in the water and are potentially dangerous to humans, animals and fish. River and harbor bottoms are contaminated by pollutants which were dumped many years ago. Also, pollutants continue to wash into the water from the air, for example, from incineration of garbage, or from land use, for example, from farms and waste disposal sites.

These highly polluted areas threaten our quality of life and economy. Widespread concern has spurred the U.S. and Canada to mount an ambitious pioneering attempt to cooperatively improve water quality.

THE SOLUTION

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, first signed by the United States and Canada in 1972 and revised and strengthened in 1987, is the blueprint for the binational clean-up effort. The International Joint Commission's Water Quality Board monitors the progress in improving water quality for the U.S. and Canadian Governments and evaluates the adequacy of clean-up plans. They have designated 42 areas of concern, 12 in Canada, 25 in the U.S. and five shared by both countries. They have set up guidelines for the cleanup or Remedial Action Plans (RAP), which the eight Great Lakes States and Province of Ontario have committed to follow. The goal of the plans is to identify specific actions needed to control existing pollution sources, abate environmental contamination already present and restore all beneficial uses of the water, such as navigation, drinking, fishing and swimming. Each Plan will:

- define the environmental problem;
- identify beneficial uses that are impaired;
- describe the causes of the problems and the sources of pollutants;
- identify and provide a schedule for remedial measures;
- identify the agencies responsible for carrying out and regulating the remedial measures; and
- describe evaluation and monitoring processes.

Developing these plans requires an "ecosystem" approach - looking at air, water and land use problems as interconnected and a combined effort of citizens, agencies and all interested parties.



PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT KEY

While each RAP will provide guidance for cleanup efforts, it will not guarantee success. Success in cleaning up Areas of Concern will be determined by:

- o education and involvement of businesses and citizens
- o funding
- o enthusiasm and resolve of our political leaders

The first of these, public education and involvement, is critical in determining funding and political will.

FACT SHEETS

The Center for the Great Lakes is preparing a Fact Sheet for each Area of Concern. These Fact Sheets are for general reference use by anyone interested in the Remedial Action Plan process around the Great Lakes region. The Fact Sheets are dated to indicate how current the information is, and the Center will update each one periodically. They inform you of involvement opportunities and help information exchange among the 42 areas that are dealing with common problems.

The Center is a private, non-profit, objective organization dedicated to helping business, government and citizens achieve a sound regional economy and healthy environment.

The Fact Sheets are free of charge and can be obtained from The Center's offices in Chicago and Toronto.

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